

mujinga oct09

## USING SPACE FOUR





space“ – a gallery putting on exhibitions and performances wherever it can beg and borrow space – is called „The Centre of the Universe“. While modesty may be in short supply, humour is not. Stone laughs at the project having a „musical director“ and as for his title, „I haven't thought of one ostentatious enough to give myself yet. But as much as it's tongue in cheek it's also a recognition of the fact that we're serious about what we're doing.“

This seriousness also informs his reasons for squatting. Amid the romantic zeal is a more political motivation – the desire for „art to be able to exist in its own context, without the primary aim of commodifying its output. Squatting is a necessity for an artist trying to find ways to work without commercial constraints.“ Many would feel that a life free of commercial constraints is a luxury rather than a necessity but Stone is quick to point out that he and his friends never claimed benefits. „Everybody was just finding a way in the city to survive. People would make 20 quid a week doing a DJ gig or something and we'd use supermarket bins for food. I have no problem with artists selling work but I think it's a really important message to send out to young people – that we can take creativity back into our hands rather than having it sold back to us at a higher price.“

Stone is something of a hero to a

sizeable swathe of said young people, but fellow !WOWOW! member Gareth Pugh has achieved even more fame as a fashion designer. Stone recounts a group of models arriving for a fitting only to be told by a policeman that they'd got the wrong building because „only homeless people live there“. There aren't many fashion designers feted by Vogue who live in squats. So is there something odd about seeing his friend's designs on Beyoncé and co? „I think it's amazing, that's exactly what he wanted to achieve and he's worked tirelessly to do it. I think this idea of defining an underground as something which a minority of people can appreciate is quite an elitist idea anyway.“

And despite hosting a weekly salon, and the preponderance of „all my abstract rhetoric“, Stone is anything but elitist. Inclusivity and an enthusiasm for collaboration come bound up in the idea of optimism, to which he has so sincerely wedded himself that Norman Rosenthal declared he had coined a fresh „-ism“. But as Stone acknowledges, every new generation has its idealism. „There is that phrase 'youthful optimism', but I think we need to work to find ways to extend the life of it. The truth is, anybody can change the world.“ He pauses. „It's important! It's heroic!“ and then he bursts into laughter.

Source - The Guardian

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# S.W.O.M.P.

On July 11, 2008, a group of people from the Pijp squatting group and Groenfront! Amsterdam squatted a vacant lot at Rustenbergerstraat 438-440. A school had previously stood on the land and was demolished against the wishes of the neighbourhood, probably to prevent it being squatted. There are currently no plans for the site, which has a tree which is protected by permits. Previous land squats had been evicted quite brutally by police so this time the activists were prepared - they were in large numbers, had the support of local residents and made sure their caravans were well secured in the ground!

After one month, the project declared itself a free state and the residents pledged to live in a carbon neutral fashion on the site. Instead of waiting for local government to decide what to do with the land they decided to take action themselves! Permaculture gardens were set up and solar panels were installed. Local squat cafes are doing benefits in support of the project. In September an open day was held with speakers and discussions. Links have been made with the Transition Town movement, which in the Netherlands appears to have a more radical spin than in England. They built a straw bale house. Once a month they have a Sunday afternoon when anyone is welcome to visit the space and look around.

**S.W.O.M.P. = Slimme Woonwagenbewoners Op Mooie Plekjes**  
**= Ingenious wagon-dwellers living on beautiful Spots**

It is the fourth time activists have squatted a piece of land in the Pijp and by far the most successful action. They are protesting against unnecessary demolition and speculation as well as taking action in support of local neighbourhoods for a sustainable future.

I was there for the squat action and also visited again in April [2009] when I happened to be in the area. It was really cool to see the changes and get inspired by the spring energy - seems like the Netherlands is a bit ahead of the UK in terms of seasons, so everything in the garden was already sprouting.

Here follows an interview with someone living at SWOMP...

*Q: First off, I read somewhere on the internet that you are not squatting, but rather wild camping "illegally". That's not true is it? Surely you have squatted the piece of land, the kadastral object?*

*A: Well legally the law doesn't say anything about squatting land without buildings on it, only on building itself. So last time they said something about illegally camping at the previous SWOMP action, but now we have some jurisdiction from a judge that said land can be squatted as well. Land squatting, land occupying, whatever, it's our temporary autonomous zone.*

worked in the Bickleigh for a year after she left her job in PR to start the gallery. „For people for whom it isn't a means to an end, there is always a romance to a building for which there is no fee. But my time there was no more or less romantic than any other building I've lived in.“ And most other buildings don't come with bucket showers, or indeed, room entrances via cramped cupboards. „It conserves heat,“ explains Dowler, firmly shutting the door behind him as we squeeze into the main living space on the first floor. He describes himself as „a bit of a dictator“ yet, strangely, the rigid house rules and hierarchy grant a certain amount of mental freedom. Knowing who's doing the washing-up that day, he explains, gives everyone more space to think about their art.

## !WOWOW!/The Centre of the Universe

Matthew Stone and members of !WOWOW! an artist collective based in Dalston, east London „Squatter“ must rank among the oddest answers to „what do you want to be when you grow up?“ but for Matthew Stone, an artist at the centre of the !WOWOW! collective, it's an unconventional childhood dream that's been energetically lived out. „When I found out about it as a kid I remember being really worried that it would be illegal by the time I was able to do it,“ he says. „I was obsessed

with the idea of it, but also with getting to London and being part of a dynamic group of young people doing things. It's that romantic idea of having a space that is your own that you can kind of do anything with.“

After graduating from Camberwell College of Art, Stone and his friends squatted their first building, a Co-op flagship store from the 1930s in south London. The space may not have been his own in any formal sense but he and his friends certainly did „kind of anything“ with it. Four empty floors, including a huge old ballroom, were filled with exhibitions, screenings, performances and, of course, some large parties. These have taken on a bit of a mythic quality, particularly the one where George W Bush's niece, Lauren Bush, turned up with security guards in tow: „a nightmare“ says Stone, „it was one of our bigger parties – 1,500 people, massive sound system, half the people in fancy dress, just very friendly and silly, but we spent the whole night running around fulfilling the requests of the police who took a sudden interest in the safety of people at our party.“ He admits that as far as the group's reputation goes, parties have tended to eclipse the art. His photographs of club kids on comedowns, all dreamy gazes and entangled limbs, have done little to dampen this image. However, the latest project is heavier on the seriousness. This „nomadic art

half-covered in childish paintings of birds and a poem about freedom. One artist, as Francis recounts with a chuckle, found himself showing his graffiti in the very same cell that he'd once been held in for the same crime. Appropriately, their latest show is themed around justice.

At 40, Francis may be older than the average squatter but having experienced the recession in the 1990s, his sympathies are very much with his younger counterparts. „I imagine they're quite disillusioned to have come out on this downturn. I think a lot of people are looking for alternatives. The skips are full of materials for artists to use and people are more aware of the wasteful nature of society these days.“

#### Hannah Barry Gallery/Lyndhurst Way

The Hannah Barry Gallery in Peckham are a group of young artists who make work and curate shows, photographed in their gallery space in south London. (L-R) Christopher Green, Hannah Barry, James Capper, Oliver Griffin, Sven Mndner, Bobby Dowler and Benjamin Walther. Owning your own gallery at the age of 25 is remarkable enough. But when that gallery owes its existence to a rat-infested squat in Peckham, the achievement seems all the more incredible. Hannah Barry, whose recent shows at a huge former glue factory sent mutters of excitement through

the national press, declares herself indebted to 78 Lyndhurst Way, both an address and the name of the squat that sprung up there. The house is now a scrubbed, newly painted building awaiting a wealthy owner, but somewhere in between utter dilapidation and its current incarnation it was home to a prodigiously productive group of artists. While living and working there they embarked on an exhaustive process of renovation, transforming it into a white-walled gallery space which from November 2006 to June 2007 hosted six shows – all while the threat of eviction was imminent. „There was always the possibility that the curtain would fall and it would all be over,“ says Barry. „But we just got on with what we could do while we could. I knew that it was taking us forward somewhere.“

In 2007 the curtain did fall. Planning permission was granted for the property but, minutes down the road, the artists found an empty Victorian pub, the Bickleigh, and took up residence. Here, one of the artists, Bobby Dowler, 25, pays the owner £5 a month in a caretaking agreement similar to the one-painting-a-month deal he had with the owner of Lyndhurst Way. Asceticism is an unlikely thing to find in a squat, or indeed an old pub, but Barry describes Dowler's life in the Bickleigh as „very strange, calm“ and „organised, frugal, and without things“. Barry initially lived and

*Q: So the garden was looking great when I visited in April - now I imagine a lot of things are growing - care to share what's exciting you in the garden currently?*

A: Well you can take a look at these photos of the gardens now.



The black currants are delicious, as well as the red berries, strawberries. Broccoli and different cabbages are growing.

We are trying to experiment with combination planting. I'm particularly fond of a guild they call "the three sisters", which was already for ages being grown by indigenous cultures in America. The basic idea is that you grow corn, beans and pumpkins together. The beans climb up the corn (instead of bamboo sticks) and the corn, that needs a lot of nitrogen for its fast growth in height, is thus helped by the beans, that fix nitrogen in the soil. The pumpkins at last grow between them, covering the ground with their big leaves and thus protecting the soil from dehydrating and repressing extensive weeds. Instead of corn, sunflowers can be used. Having a sunflower here and there in your garden help controlling aphids since they prefer sitting on your sunflower. The pumpkins in their turn could also be courgettes or cucumbers.

*Q: How is it going with your neighbours, the ones immediately around you (who can look out of their window and see you) and those in the Pijp area more generally?*

A: Up till now we got a lot of positive reactions as with any other squatting action here, but maybe a bit more because were so visible. We didn't get any involvement from the neighbourhood though, on open days and stuff people from the neighbourhood were under-represented. Now we started giving basic practical workshops; composting, toilet building, soon we'll build a clay oven, and we will spin wool

and knit it, make seed bombs and do political infonights with movies in between. The turn-up for practical stuff seems to be higher but we hope to through that we can increase involvement in the more political activities. Like building a community garden on an empty lot as a tierra y libertad action, during the summit for indigenous people in south america, in support of activist over there. (see: <http://www.indymedia.nl/nl/2009/05/59719.shtml>)



*Q: What's your take on the Transition Town movement? I'm interested in it of course, it's a step in the right direction, but my feeling (shared by a lot of grassroots activists in the UK I think, for example check this critique in Schnews - <http://tinyurl.com/schnewstt>) is*

*that it is necessary but not really my path. For example they are organising a 'leave your car at home day' every month in Lewes near where I live, but why not aim a bit higher and leave your car at home more than once a month?*

A: Well it hasn't taken a more radical step yet, as is it is in its initial stage. But considering that a lot of the projects in Holland that are taking on initiatives are a lot with their feet in the squatters/activist scene. Hopefully the transition town concept really won't function as blueprint, like Hopkins insists it is not. I think that after years of 'car free' days (a tradition since the seventies) silly things like that will not cross the mind of anybody seriously working on change.

I don't know if I believe in the transition town as a concept to change the world, control climate change, attain an equitable distribution of land, resources and food, and approach more direct-democracy through an ever involved and locally based self governing neighbourhood. It's a nice vision, and for me as far away as my own slightly different anarchist views on things, but still I do believe in building up knowledge, skills and wisdom about other ways of living. Ways to be able to survive together with as much fellow inhabitants of the earth when the shit hits the fan.

When the system collapses, what is the alternative, do we still need to work that out, and rally for it, convince people? Or are there already solid communities, living and working together in new ways present...

infrastructure in another room. Everyone was just really happy to be there.“

of buildings had stood empty since 2005, which seems shockingly wasteful for a space at the heart of the city.



#### **Artspace Lifespace**

From outside, the boarded-up Bridewell police station and fire station in Bristol's town centre look utterly lifeless: my cab driver repeatedly asks whether I'm sure I don't want the other police station, the functioning one. Yet once inside the complex, the cells and offices are thrumming with activity. At the beginning of last year a squatting group called Artspace Lifespace took over the site, renamed it „The Island“ and have been busily transforming it into a community arts centre ever since. This huge complex

Jono, a street artist, who returned to Bristol inspired by the squat culture of Berlin, agrees: „There are so many properties in Bristol that are empty. Doing this brings a vibe to the city and it's a great thing.“

As Doug Francis, who founded the group in 1992, observes, the buildings have proved strangely suitable to the group's various creative purposes; in particular, the old cells in the police station provide a series of mini-galleries for various street artists to exhibit in. Especially striking is a white-tiled cell whose walls are now

multimillion-pound mansions in Mayfair. The „posh“ seemed to refer as much to the grand residences they were occupying as to their own backgrounds, which were very much in the mould of the archetypal „bo-bo“ or „bourgeois bohemian“. Is a spell of fashionable squalor set to become a rite of passage for graduates?

### The Da! Collective

The grand facades of Mayfair's mansions are an incongruous setting for the two scruffy 20-somethings showing me around. Steph, whose only luggage is a copy of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is wearing yellow boots, patterned tights and one of the purple jackets worn by free paper distributors. The stitching on its back has been neatly modified to read „the londonpaper“. „Yeah, one day I'll set up a publication of the same name – an antidote to the raping of minds that the londonpaper does.“ She is part of a group of artists who found themselves in a media storm when they moved into a Grade II-listed mansion on Grosvenor Square. The attention intensified when they moved down the road to a building on Clarges Mews worth even more millions. „Papers were tracking down people's families, there were character assassinations ...“ says Thomas, a tall, unshaven man in his twenties.

Soon after the property's location was identified in the press, the group was

evicted, and moved to live and work in another property in south London whose whereabouts is „undisclosed“: it may be legal, but few landlords are sympathetic to squatting and most act fast to get rid of uninvited guests. Not that this particular group should give them cause for concern – a „leave no trace“ policy was firmly enforced for any rooms with period features and Steph stresses that „it's always about the space that you're in, as far as what we do. You've got to be sensitive to that.“

At the Clarges Mews property they called their project „The Temporary School of Thought“. The name invokes the anarchist tradition of the „free school“ – a network of people sharing knowledge – yet also seems to include a wry acknowledgement of the grandiose ambition of establishing a „school“ in the artistic sense. But rather than an artistic manifesto, this group seems to have formed around humbler desires – above all the desire to live in some kind of creative community. The school itself was certainly a community-minded enterprise, even if Mayfair's wealthy denizens weren't among those visiting. With an eclectic timetable of classes (labyrinth-building and French book-binding included) it was open – and free – to anyone. „It was amazing,“ Steph says. „There'd be the charleston going on in one room and then a really intense discussion about

Then there is another motivation to be involved as activists. of course i don't want to compromise in defense of mother earth. And also i don't like the way of not judging persons or institute, and super inclusiveness. But the more reason to get involved in an early stage and make sure that we are a part of this. As an activist i don't want to alienate myself from my surroundings, and thus i involve myself in these surroundings. Think global act local isn't going to work if we are not willing to place ourselves in the middle of society. So i choose to apart from working on the destruction of old systems at the same time work on new ways of organising, living and interacting with and on this earth.

*Q: I'm sure most people reading this can imagine how you are living as a sustainable project eg solar panels for electricity, compost toilet, bicycles to get around etc etc but do you have any top tips or clever site-specific solutions so you can mention? Maybe your water supply?*

A: Our water supply is just an old fashioned hand-driven ground-water-pump. Also the hand-washing machine is worth mentioning. It's a little barrel that you can turn by hand. You can wash up to four kilos with it. It takes two times three minutes of turning to wash it, then rinse and dry it. For one person it means doing the laundry twice a week (your under-wear, t shirts and socks, pants and sweaters can be washed less often) it costs you about two times 20 minutes a week.

*Q: I saw recently on Indymedia some fotos taken of an amphibious vehicle from the Dutch Army standing outside SWOMP [<http://tinyurl.com/indymomp>]. Was this serious harrasment or a chance encounter? Have you actually had much interest from the “authorities” concerning your free state status?*

A: Hmm we don't know, we guess it was chance but at the same time you can see on the fotos that their teargas grenade launcher was uncovered at our side of the car but not at the other side. It might be both it might be none. For the rest we haven't had any contact with authorities apart from the day after our declaration of independence: the neighbourhood cop came to congratulate us with our new freestate...

*Q: Following on from that, what is your life expectancy? How have you dealt with the fact that you might get evicted with a few weeks' notice?*

A: Yes we are dealing with it from the beginning, we knew we just try to build our showcase for climate neutral living as quick as possible even though they will easily evict us bulldozer it. The first few months we were constantly occupying 24/7, now we live there as in any other house that could be evicted at any moment.

*Q: I know last winter was pretty cold at SWOMP - are you better prepared for next the one?*

A: Yep the straw bale house is completely finished and equipped with a wood burner we can also cook on. If we will last that long that is.



SWOMP - A free state in Amsterdam

## THE ARTISTS WHO ARE HOT TO SQUAT ...

In a semi-derelict building in Lambeth, south London, amid collapsed sofas and empty wine bottles, a group of squatters in their 20s are playing a word-association game. It started off with „laws“ and is followed round the circle with „breaking“, „entering“ and then „exiting“. Accidentally or otherwise, here is the common perception of squatting in four words. But squatting itself is not a crime in England (unlike Scotland), and this group’s presence – making films, building sculptures and busily renovating as they paint walls as well as canvases – is completely legal, albeit very much a secret from the building’s owner. „I don’t feel we should apologise for being here. We’re opportunists,“ says Ed, a mustachioed 26-year-old who works in video. „I’m damned if I’m going to work six days a week to pay for a studio space.“

He is not alone. Over the past few years an „art squat“ subculture has been quietly growing in the UK to include not just opportunists like Ed, but creative and ambitious groups for whom the decision to squat – for working or living or both – comes as much from an idealistic, DIY ethos as it does from financial expediency. Few young artists can afford to pay rent on housing and studio space at the same

time. Fewer still can afford the luxury of a vast exhibition space they can do what they want with. Straitened times call for ever greater resourcefulness. They also – luckily for artists if not the former occupants – mean more empty buildings than ever. According to England’s Empty Homes Agency, 784,495 are unoccupied, and the number rises each day. Taking their cue from similar movements in Berlin and Amsterdam, artists in this country are realising that squatting provides not just freedom from paying rent but also extraordinary creative freedom. The chance to make large-scale work, to put on frequent, artist-curated exhibitions and to form collaborative relationships based on sharing a space, has made squatting more than simply a housing solution.

In some cases, the squatters even have the backing of local authorities. Wandsworth, in south London, is one of several councils encouraging artists to make good use of the „slack space“ of shops left empty by the recession by offering them grants, and a similar scheme is under way in Dursley, Gloucestershire where artists use empty shops as galleries. However, such a broad-minded approach to squatting is still the exception. The start of the year saw a sustained spluttering of media outrage over the „posh squatters“ – a young art collective who hoisted their anarchist flags and took up residence in two

## SQUATTERS TAKE OVER FORECLOSED HOMES

„For Sale“ signs hang in the yard of the big, new home on Fillmore Street in Hollywood, just steps from North Lake and the intracoastal. The home is in foreclosure and has a buyer. But it also had a squatter.

„It just looked like people were moving in,“ said neighbor Donna Rion. Rion watched four people move boxes into the home. Police say one of them was Darren Rucker, who now goes by the name Zamir Muhammad El. According to neighbors, the accused squatters not only moved in, but changed the locks, too.

What sent off warning bells for Rion was when she saw them pull a chain across the driveway. „It was just a chain,“ she said „and then it had a no trespassing sign with a picture of a temple on it. „When I went and read it,“ she continued, „it said all this stuff about the temple and aboriginal rights and I didn't understand what it was.“

Investigators explained the group claims to be part of „The Marrakush Science Temple Church.“ The group apparently claimed that because of ancient treaties, they had rights to the property. When the man buying the home saw them there, they ordered him off the property, saying he was trespassing. Police were called, but by the time officers arrived, the four squatters had cleared out.

„With all these foreclosures, there seems to be a lot of crazy stuff going on,“ said real estate attorney Giovanni Nicosia, who told CBS4 News that getting squatters out of vacant homes is not always easy. It can be expensive and time consuming. He knows first hand. „In one of my rentals, I found someone was living there. It turns out it was like a homeless person, who just moved in.“ After two months and several court hearings, he was finally able to evict the squatter.

In the Hollywood case, they were lucky; the group left just as quickly as it came.

# in the news

## DEFROCKED PRIEST SQUATTING IN VICARAGE GIVEN REPRIEVE

A judge has denied the Church of England the power to evict a defrocked cleric who is squatting in a vicarage.

At Birmingham county court yesterday, district judge Simon Bull adjourned the hearing after questioning whether the church had rights over the property.

„It may be of inconvenience to the claimants, but if there are squatters in my neighbours' garden and my neighbours are not around, I don't have the right to take possession,“ he said.

Two bishops from the diocese of Lichfield were hoping to be granted the power to evict the Rev Patrick Okechi, who was sacked from his position as vicar of the Church of the Good Shepherd with St John in West Bromwich after it emerged he had been involved in an extra-marital affair.

*Source - The Guardian*

Last December a church tribuna found the father-of-three was guilty of „conduct unbecoming to the office and work of a clerk in holy orders“, but despite the ruling Okechi has failed to leave his accommodation and is instead seeking reinstatement. He did not attend yesterday's hearing and has not commented since being barred from office.

While neither bishop was present in court, a diocesan spokesman said there was disappointment at the delay. „We want to move swiftly toward the appointment of a new vicar and we need the vicarage to house the vicar,“ he said.

„In law, the vicarage belongs to the incumbent, the vicar. In this case, there isn't a vicar to own it and so the judge wants to ensure that, before he gives possession of the property to the bishops, the bishops do actually have the right for that.

„We have been given some time to do more legal research and we will do that, and at the next hearing we'll hopefully get the possession.“

# SquatMeetUp

As we left Bristol on Monday evening, we tuned into the local radio news to hear one Jake Eisenstein, squatter, explaining why we had taken a £3 million mansion over the weekend for a national squatters' convention. He laid out the reasons why in a time of economic depression we must take back the empty spaces and put them to community use both for housing and social activities. It all made sense and there was no spin added by the news. Certainly this is indeed a good time to kick off a new wave of squatting as levels of emptiness increase and dissatisfaction breeds more radical politics. But I can't say this meeting really made a good start on that ... the sense was more of a chance missed rather than an inspiring beginning.

Don't get me wrong, the Bristol crew took on a big job and pulled it off pretty well. The cooking crew sorted out excellent meals three times a day with a lot of stuff skipped. The location, a swanky mansion house in the poshest part of Bristol was taken, held and handed back without major incident. The mainstream press was dealt with and presented quite a favourable view of the action.

However, in terms of what I came down to do (I'm framing it in these terms to ensure that it is clear that I am only speaking as one participant), the meeting didn't really work. I wanted to discuss setting up more print publications from and about the squat scene, and further I wanted to express and harden my nebulous thoughts about building a UK squat movement. Both these things were difficult to do in an atmosphere where drunkenness was rife and there was no fixed schedule.

I would be well up for having a squatters' social meeting where we just meet up and get fucked, that's also a really important bit of getting to know each other and building solidarity. I discussed this with some people before the meet and the feedback was that it would end up being a munterfest, which is kind of what happened anyways. People should do what they want to do unless it impinges on someone else's rights - this is for me a fundamental belief and if that makes me an anarchist, or an autonomist, or whatever then all well and good, the label will stick. If people want to drink, snort and smoke their way through life, well, fine I say, they should go right ahead.

the ladder car, evicting the occupiers who were taken away one by one and put into a school bus that drove off and left many outside of town. Many were under the legally punishable age of 15. The two houses were connected through a tunnel system running all around the area and some moved around and between the houses during the evictions. One person broke a leg getting out but managed to escape the police.

A group of special cops climbed up the ladders to the roof where the occupants of the first house were sitting while holding on to each other in chains. After an hour the occupants were violently forced down one at a time through a hole down to the attic. Pepper-spray and arm bars were used on those that resisted the removal and several were beaten on the way through the attic.

After getting identified and taken in buses to the cop station in Lund, all except a few were let go after being charged with illegal entry. The others were kept in cells one day more together with the 7 arrested from the first day.

Later that evening there was one more attempt to squat a house but the cops were prepared and they were removed. 90 people were arrested or taken into custody during the weekend and the liberal press was of course desperate and outraged, trying to claim that the insides of the houses had been wrecked and that the demonstrations were violent.

The group that took the initiative consider the weekend as a huge success. With 2 houses squatted and 4 attempts the goal of the weekend was achieved: to squat houses in a mass action.



crowd. The breakout group ran out to a park and got to the goal for the white block – an old abandoned observatory, and a ladder was put up and a window that was smashed in. One person got into the house and a second was on the way in as the civil cops dragged the person out (who cut up an arm on the glass).

In the confusion 2 cops fell into a hole by the side of the house and one of them broke his foot climbing up. It turned out to be the leader cop of the eviction of „Smultronstället“, Per Grahn- a well known ugly face in Lund who was caught on camera as it all happened and a video was put on youtube. 26 people were arrested, and the main demo was called off for the day.

Most people gathered in the bar of a student union called Smålands Nation to get food and rest. Some hours later a reclaim the streets was held outside the cop station in support of the arrested people from that day. The mobile party continued back to Smålands Nation where there was a nice party with the sound system playing in the street with football and small fires on the street.

During the night a house was secretly squatted by about 60 people. It had earlier been used as a mental hospital for young people and after the barricades were made they spent the night in the house.

Sunday 17/5

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At 1400 the second day's demo started leaving the center with some 300 people. After about half of the way the news was announced in the speaker wagon that a house had been occupied in a southern part of town and cheering the demo started running in that direction. At the house, located in the middle of a park area the cops had just started surrounding the house and about 30 occupiers had barricaded the rest of the house and taken to the roof. As the demo reached the park it split up and started running into smaller groups that managed to pass past the cop lines to get close to the house. The police was busy trying to hold a ring around the house but couldn't prevent one big group that got into the empty house next to the already squatted one and with about 60 people they closed up and made barricades.

After about an hour of stress with the pigs that tried to defend and extend the restricted area around the houses, two cop vans drove up to the houses with built in ladders. Horses and dogs were used to try chase off the supporters amongst the trees, but they had little success. One person was bitten by a dog, several were removed by the police and 30 were arrested. The pigs eventually entered into the second house using

It's their choice after all, moreover their fairly rational reaction to this mess we are in. But I know (and am hoping to meet more) people who think there are other ways forward, who want to build up the structures of oppositional culture in this country. The squat scene is and certainly should be one place to encounter such people. But it seems like in England, as opposed to the Netherlands, or France, or Spain, the munters outnumber the activists.

Whilst there were some good workshops, like lockpicking and networking, there was no schedule set before the meeting; the plan to set the schedule on Friday night evaporated, a schedule was set Saturday morning and then lunched out pretty much immediately. We lost crucial time because there is some vague notion of consensus which seems to be that everyone has to be there to decide things. That's not consensus, that's the tyranny of structurelessness, a problem plaguing the activist groups trying to escape destructive hierarchies for decades already. A few people should have met up to set the schedule Friday night after soliciting suggestions for workshops at the infostall (as was done). Then we should have had a schedule and stuck to it. I don't care if less people would have come, I want to meet (and discuss issues with) people who are motivated enough to get up out of bed and make it to the

room, not drunks who like the sound of their own voice. I discussed this with a friend who said I was talking about fascism. That's not fascism. Fascism is telling other people what to do and imprisoning them when they refuse. Why is this similar? I'm talking about the personal freedom to choose what you wanna do, whether that be meeting up or getting pissed. I could go on but hopefully you get my point.

These thoughts are offered as constructive criticisms and I hope will be taken as such. I know we have to work with what we have not from utopian standpoints, I know some space invaders share my concerns so maybe we can learn from the experience, although it seems that several mistakes were simply repeats of things which happened at the last meet in Leeds. The thing is though, it wouldn't actually take much effort to turn things around. And this is a pretty basic first step in getting more organised. If we want truly want to build a better world, we are going to have to get off our arses and put in some work.

To end on a positive note, it was wicked to have a guided tour of a fire engine (yes you did read that right) and lots of good personal connections were made.

Stand by for a zine about UK squat culture! *note - in the end this didn't actually happen coz i only got one submission...*

## 'Legally, my hands are tied'

by Emily Koch  
e.koch@bepp.co.uk

SQUATTERS have set up home in a manor house in Clifton.

A group of 40 people are now living rent free in the Grade II-listed building, which is due to be converted into a £7-million apartment block.

Furious owner Jason Birakos visited the building, bought last year for £1m, to discover dozens of squatters inside who refused to leave.

The group can live there because squatting is legal if entry to an empty property is not forced and there is no damage caused.

Mr Birakos must now get court orders to boot them out.

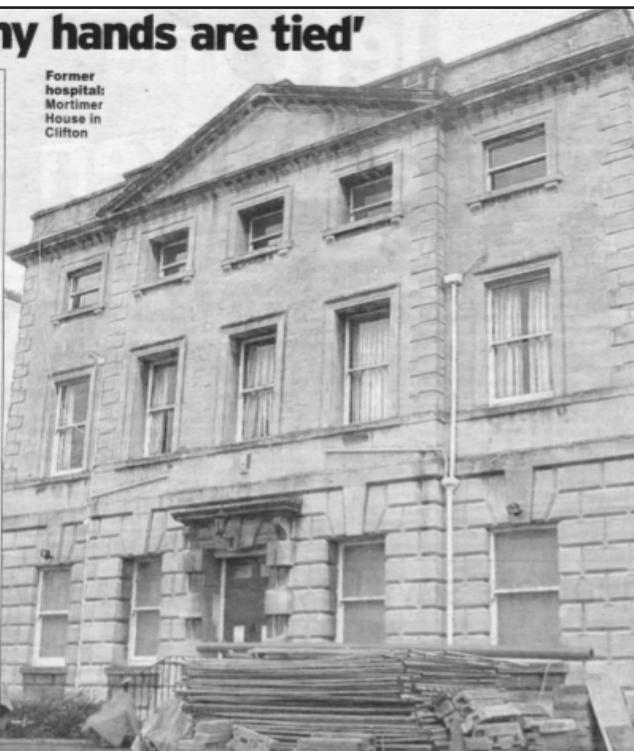
The four-storey Mortimer House, on the corner of Mortimer Road and Clifton Down Road in Clifton, was once a maternity hospital.

The squatters say they plan to

• Turn to  
Page 2

I want  
them out:  
Owner  
Jason  
Birakos

Former  
hospital:  
Mortimer  
House in  
Clifton



# SQUATTERS' £3m HOME

made. The plan was for 3 main blocks in different colors to squat one house each. The locations of the houses were to be kept secret until the same day and it was agreed to keep to a line of confrontative non-violence and not to negotiate with neither police nor politicians.

Saturday 16/5:

A few hundred people started gathering at the main square in Lund around 14:00. There were bands playing, speeches, music, food and in general a great mood. Many wore white overalls and the 4 different blocks had their own colors. The aim for people in the 3 blocks dressed in red, green and white was to attempt to squat one house each and the blue block was for supporters that wanted a low level of confrontation.

Only about 300 m after the demo started, it reached the first house the green block was aiming for. Carrying ladders behind the front banner, the green broke out to the right in a crossing and started rushing towards the entrance to the yard by the house. Most of them passed a line of horse cops by clapping and screaming to scare the horses back, but were later closed in by the horses. In the yard some of them climbed up a ladder trying to enter the house through a window, there was some struggle as the cops got up to the

roof. About 20 people were caught and held by civil cops in the yard but some managed to escape through the back door of a restaurant, back to the street.

Out in the street the cops started to close off the entrance to the yard and make lines to keep the other blocks out. Smoke and firecrackers were thrown against the horses which gave the cops problems to control them. Meanwhile on the other side of the corner the red block blocked the street from the cops and tried to storm into the yard through another gate with big shields held by 4 people, but were blocked by a line of cops in the doorway. The attempt to push through the line in the gate was stopped when the cops beat the ones in the front with pepper spray and truncheon blows to heads and legs. One person was hit unconscious and was taken to the hospital with concussion.

After some confusion and as the cops started to kettle the remaining 2 blocks from both sides and after some waiting there was a break out attempt by the white block, now pretty mixed up, in the opposite direction. One of the bigger shields was taken by the pigs but with the smaller padded shields in a line, around 150 managed to get through the pig line that started using massive amounts of pepper spray against the

## **REPORT FROM SQUATTING FESTIVAL IN LUND, SWEDEN 16-17 MAY**

### **Background**

For many years in Sweden, squatting houses has been something not attempted very often, a lot because of the no-tolerance laws and practice by the Swedish state. The attempts during the last 15-20 years met heavy sentences and the interest in squatting sank to a low level. After the eviction of Ungdomshuset in Copenhagen many were inspired by the resistance and the movement that arose around the fight for a youth house, and the idea started to seem more real again. During the international squat days of action in April 2008 several houses were squatted in many Swedish cities, purposely during a limited time to make public activities.

The temporary squatting continued after the action days and in the October 2008 a house in Lund was squatted, later called „smultronstället“ which lasted for about a month. It was publicly squatted and the squatters intended to live there as long as possible. As it happened the housing situation in Sweden in general was going towards an extreme level compared to the comfortable existence most people took for granted after years of

social democratic rule in the supposed model society. Lund, a small town mainly based around its university, had reached a very difficult housing situation especially for young people from the area. It was even harder for them to find a flat than for students moving there from other towns. They quickly gained a big and broad support among neighbors and the people from town with their open and inviting attitude and many came by to visit. The local media also portrayed the whole thing surprisingly good. Negotiations were started with the municipality that hadn't dared to give the eviction order yet as they were blamed for the housing politics. But after weeks of meetings and promises from the side of the politicians the squat was evicted without any notice before. The night of the eviction a big demonstration was held through the city center and shortly after, two new houses were squatted, though they were evicted the same day.

Tired of the lies and backstabbing from the local politicians, the occupiers decided to make a big festival to squat new houses in the town center in a mass action, inspired the similar G13 in Copenhagen. So as the 16th of May got closer, people from many other Swedish towns had been invited and preparations were

Monday, March 16, 2009

## **Squatters meet to discuss national homelessness problem**

**by Lynne Hutchinson  
and Sam Rkaina  
epnews@bepp.co.uk**

**SQUATTERS** who occupied a manor house in Clifton were due to move out first thing this morning after holding what they described as a 'national squat meeting'.

The group of about 40 people have been living in the grade II-listed Mortimer House since last week, and chose it so they could meet to discuss homelessness in the current economic climate.

Owner Jason Birakos discovered the occupiers when he visited the building, bought last year for £3 million, in Clifton Down Road.

The property, a former maternity hospital, is due to be converted into a £7m apartment block, but has been empty for a number of years.

The group had been moved out but said they would leave at 6am today after their weekend conference was over.

Squatters the Post spoke to yesterday stressed their occupation had been peaceful and not for a party.

One squatter, calling himself Dave, said Mr Birakos had hired security guards to look after the property but they had got on well with them.

He said: "Security has been fantastic. We've made them cups of tea."

But he added: "We have had threats from various people."

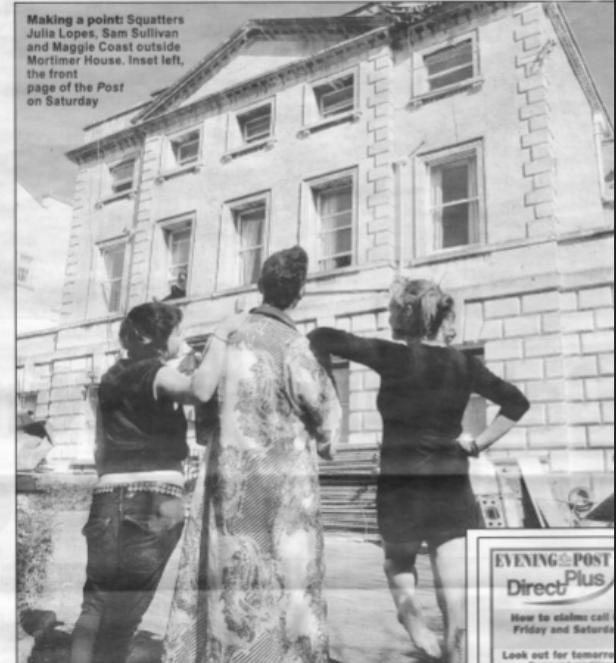
"We had a phone call threatening a group of people were on their way round to beat us socialists up."

"Around 6.30pm on Saturday a group of six to eight came round threatening



en violence and wanted to cause trouble but security didn't let them in.

"We've made an agreement and we will stick to it."



# *The Shape left by the Absence:*

## *The Memory and the Hope of Squats and Social Centres*

I have just started to read one of the most beautifully-written monographs, one that is both compelling in its content and stunning in its prose. It is a sociological work written by Avery Gordon and it deals with the haunting of memory within the very minute complexes of the social underweavings of life. She takes the image of an elderly lady (Professor in fact), as she traces back her colonial ancestry. [1]

Her great-great grandmother was a slave, and the owner of that very same slave was her great-great grandfather. The lady is trying to find her grandmother's silent presence within her past, that which has been muffled by the ancestral owner's (great-great grandfather's) quickened hand. You are probably wondering what on earth any of this has got to do with squats and social centres. Well, for Gordon, this image allows her to bring into motion the force of her project, the search for the 'shape described by the absence', the apparitions that demand their recognition from their unrequited existences and manifestations of times gone by. This description I thought was so eerie,

and so powerful, I thought I should share it with you in this article.

So what am I on about? I am on about the restless soul that lies dormant after the violent trauma of colonialism, the acceleration of private property, the expansion of capital, and the enclosure of the commons. And this soul rekindles itself, re-enters the now planetary market culture and opens out the disappropriated space, in its many guises, and many forms. As the expansion of capital has been so fast, this unhappy ghost stirs in matching fervour as the task of degenerating capitalism's grasp becomes all the more pivotal. And yet, what we see in the crises and balls ups of the global financial world, of the past year and a half or so, is evidence of a system of organisation that is very much in decline. The memory of the commons interrupts and disturbs its recalcitrant cousin.

Not intentionally making this any sort of ephemeral description of the squatting movement and its attached social centre contingent, but I have been very much moved by Avery Gordon's eloquent presentation of the memories

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**AMSTERDAM**

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In Breda there were three days of events at the squatted church (left) and on Friday a nice action with a 'Housing Need' office installed outside the council buildings (below)



## DEN BOSCH

A house was squatted in the centre of town (above)

## ZAANDAM



of domination that you can see jutting jaggedly under the shibboleth of enclosure's grasp.

As one of the members of a collective recently described to me, squats and social centres find themselves (using a quote from science fiction writer, James Tiptree Jnr) within the 'chinks of the world machine.' These are the loop holes and interstices of liminal existence that we must exploit politically, she explained to me. Getting to the nub of it, I am offering squatting and social centres as an example of a 'remainder' of a previous form of social organisation, one based on a belief in the earth 'as a common treasury for all.' [2] This work comes along side that of the 'Autonomous Geographies' project's focus on the commons, who have written about social centres and the reappropriation of space at great length, and which you should have a look at. [3]

Using the idea of the commons as a platform, you can see where the role of memory fits in – and so too that of haunting. But it's not all about the memory, it's not all about some nostalgic ghost that each squat is apparently supposed to represent or inhabit.

Perhaps more fittingly is the role of time, the disjunction of its nature, and the opportunities that can be had in its circular and simultaneous dimensions.

I was told it was quite a job to give a history of squatting (after another interrogation session on my behalf), when you're not dealing with anything near the resemblance of linear time!

But because we can feel the cries of history within the day-to-day of squatting, or postmodern-day 'commoning', the past is incorporated into the now, and that's how and why the emotion and passion keeps its hold. A helpful guide or two in conceptualising this can be found in the works of Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch.

Firstly, Benjamin guides us most obviously through his "Theses on the History of Philosophy." [4]

He depicts what he calls the angel of history (Angelus Novus) via the artwork of the same name of Paul Klee (1920). Angelus Novus is looking back towards the past, being blown away by the forceful wind of Progress, into the future. The past stands for the image of injustice and catastrophe, and yet, the portrayal here is that the most effective manner for humankind to understand the mistakes of times gone by, there

must be a grasping of tragedy, one that is unabashed by looking back and learning. Within this, Benjamin understands the dimensions of distance – time and space – as always present, within the past, the present, and the future. So, the quest for lost time is the same as the ‘quest for lost futures.’ [5]

The present, is saturated with tales of the past, figures of times before, and events that happened, or were to happen. The present is the past, and is the future.

There is a dialectic here that Benjamin works with, a concentration of history that is rooted in the binary of the future and the past, “... of messianic expectation and remembrance.” [6]

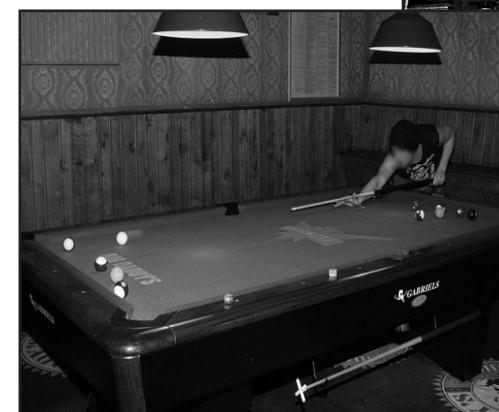
So take our figure of the squat, and where it fits into this Benjaminian framework. Squats and social centres offer us a bottled version of the principles of the past, through their evocative existence as and their coming together of the temporal and the spatial. A squat or a social centre is what Benjamin might even confer as an ‘auratic moment’. Giving the poignancy of an image (like that of Avery Gordon’s), he uses the metaphor of a shooting star to describe this auratic phenomena, or the experience of the aura. This spectre of the commons in the form of the aura, is the “...unique phenomenon of a distance however close it may be.” [7]



Here, the depths of space and time (dimensions of distance), allow for each to greet the other - and the auratic experience is the meeting of the two. Squats and social centres are this aura, this chink in the world machine, this offering of alternatives, that appear at the human-made boundaries of what we perceive. And through the memory-work of the commons.

It's not all about the past though. Squatting pushes forward the margins through what Marxist Ernst Bloch would have called a form of ‘anticipatory consciousness’. These unrequited pasts and rightly-so belligerent phantasms are also the future in the now, the

## NIJMEGEN



Amongst other actions, a huge old bar and restaurant called Big Daddy's was successfully squatted, complete with bar and pool tables!

# HET KRAAKVERBOD KOMT

On October 15, 2009, the Tweede Kamer voted to ban squatting in the Netherlands. This means it will most likely be illegal to squat (with a maximum prison sentence of one year) by January next year. In response, squatters organised a national demonstration in Utrecht on October 24 and the following weekend was designated Landelijke Kraakactie Dagen - National Squat Action Days! Here follows a photo report of just some of the actions. Source - indymedia.nl



EINDHOVEN

'NOT YET' as Bloch would say.<sup>[8]</sup> Again, my lady from the collective said she functioned as though the future had already happened, which she was at pains to make clear was not the same as living for the now. I can quote her as explaining: "Our sense of futurity is not utopian, but a realism – in the space there is already a future, one non-hierarchical and egalitarian in tension with the past and future of the dominant culture of oppression."

Back to an image, a reflection or an inkling of what I am talking about. Imagine a 25 year old girl, just arrived from another country or another town, just settling into her newly found home with her squatter friends in a social centre. She sits and has lunch at a lovely old unwanted mahogany table, in the sunny newly transformed allotment space that used to be a rubble pile. She discusses with her fellow cohorts the way in which to manage their space, given time to speak and the opportunity to disagree as she sees fit. They collectively concur to continue their outreach to the local community, they determine the parameters through which they will do this. Her face illuminated by the midday sun, she commits herself to having her space, as a public space. Sipping her coffee and deftly rolling another cigarette, she understands the meaning her role has and

the project she is part of. She is allowing the apparitions of the commons to come through, and paving the way for the encounters and the possibilities of the future.

So the aura of squats and social centres rain forth for the future and allow the shape left by the absence to be filled. This is the hope that the movement. Fill the void, enact the future, and ensure the commons are revived and discarded of their supernatural form, at this very timely moment within the narratives of social organisation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The lady is Patricia Williams, and the recounting of her past can be found in "The Alchemy of Race and Rights" (1991)

<sup>2</sup> A quote from Gerard Winstanley, the 17th century radical preacher of The Diggers

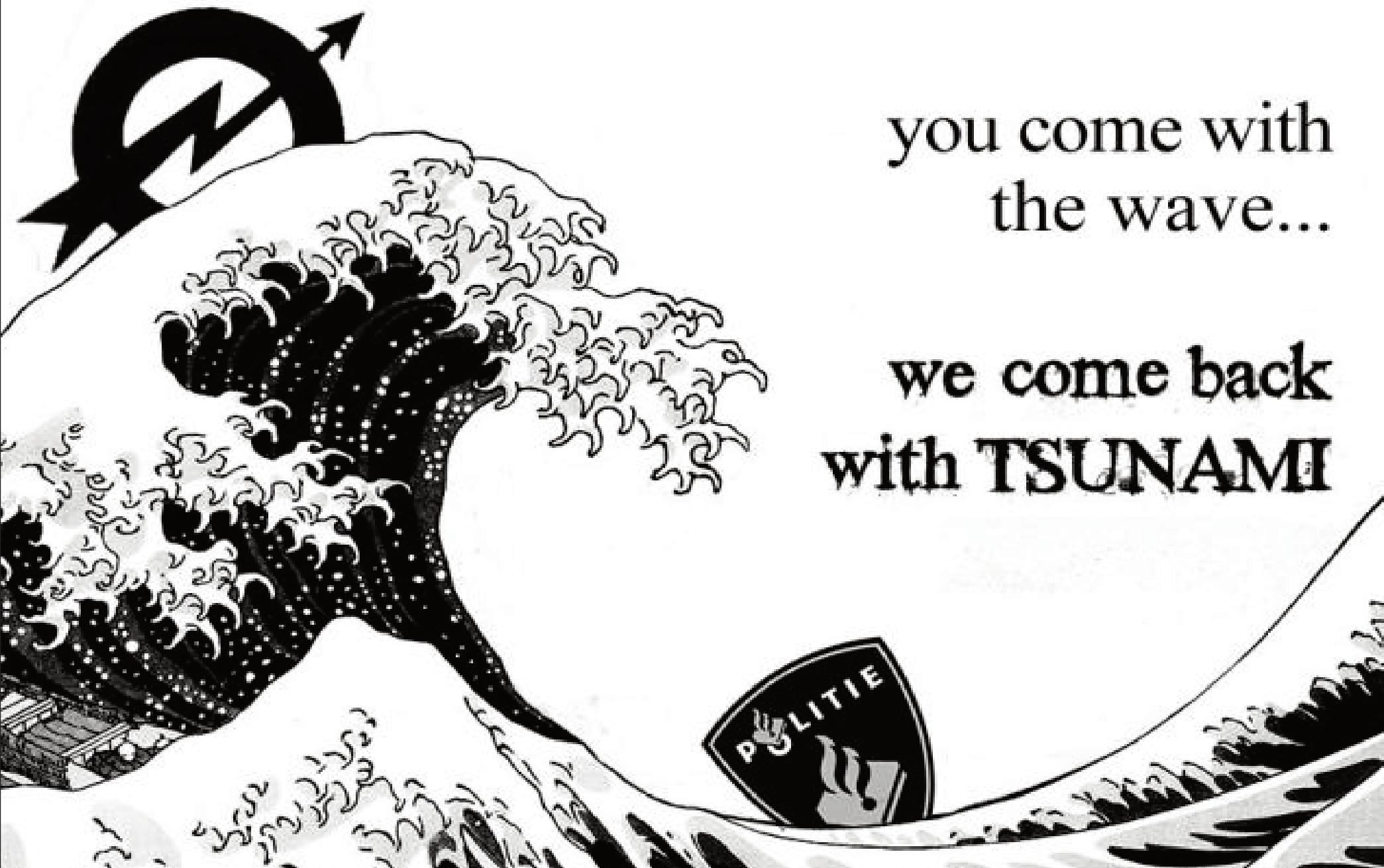
<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.autonomougeographies.org>

<sup>4</sup> See Benjamin, W. (1999), "Illuminations", London, Pimlico

<sup>5</sup> Szondi, P. and Mendelsohn, H. (1978), "Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin", 4, Critical Inquiry, 3, 491-506, 501

<sup>6</sup> Szondi, P. and Mendelsohn, H. (1978), "Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin", 4, Critical Inquiry, 3, 491-506, 504

<sup>7</sup> Moses, S. (2009), "The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem", Stanford, Stanford University Press, 78



**you come with  
the wave...**

**we come back  
with TSUNAMI**